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THE ODE OF LIFE

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"THE EPIC OF HADES"

Sir Lewis Morris.

Like to the falling of a star,
Or as the flights of eagles are. . . .
BISHOP KING, 1657

46943

THIRD EDITION.

LONDON
C. KEGAN PAUL & CO., 1, PATERNOSTER SQUARE
1880

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TO MY MANY FRIENDS,

KNOWN AND UNKNOWN,

I DEDICATE

THIS BOOK.

PREFACE.

In the present work the Ode, which has such splendid, and yet so few, representatives in English verse, is carried somewhat further than has hitherto been the case, in the direction of a continuous plan. It has been sought to overcome the objection to so long a poem of that nature, by dividing it into minor odes, distinct from each other, but each finding its place in the consecutive development of the whole.

Whatever may be the fate of the work, the writer knows well that nothing more mature can be expected from him, nor can he hope again to find unappropriated so fruitful a subject for verse.

March 1st, 1880.

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THE ODE OF CREATION.

THE ODE OF LIFE.

THE ODE OF CREATION.

A dark and boundless deep,
And a blind height above,
Untrodden fields of sleep,
Wherein no force may move,
Where every sound is still,
Nor breathes a living breath;—
These are the heights, these are the depths, these are the voids of Death.

But slowly on the lifeless plain
There wakes a far-sent ray, a little star,

A tiny spark of Being from afar,
A throb of precious pain.
It is done, it has been, it has risen, the glimmer of Life,
The dark void withdrawing around,
It breaks with a whisper of sound,
Through the wastes of silence and sleep,
There is no more stillness nor Death,
The great Universe wakes with a deep-drawn singultient breath.
The great orbs cohere and spin on their measureless ways—
—The great suns awaken and shine, ringed with girdles of fire every one—
All the worlds are on fire and ablaze—
The flaming globes circle and whirl each one round its sun
—The hot seas seethe and bellow—the fixed hills glow—

And the fire of Creation burns fierce while the centuries grow;
And Life and Time have begun!

Myriads on myriads of years!
Or was there indeed no time except in the Infinite Mind?
And was there indeed no ceaseless circling of spheres?
Since no sentient eye might mark the peripheries wind,
And at length the great Life of the worlds grown concentrate would thrill
Through some lowly speck of matter, which, waxing apart,
Grew conscious by slow degrees, and blossomed in Will;
Weak centres of Force, which floated as motes in a beam,
Automatic, contracting, expanding, but consciousless yet.
Till a stronger force working within them would raise them once more,

Pushing with inchoate fin as if with an oar
Afloat on the slow warm stream;
And another Creation has come and a new-begun strife,
With this primal glimmer of life.

Myriads on myriads of years! if Time there were yet,
When no soul was by to remember or to forget;
The fin growing stronger, and changing to wing or to claw,
Struggle on struggle, sentience, consciousness, ravin, and pain,
Monstrous and mailèd forms in the ooze, or hurtling thro' air,
Waging through æons of time the ineffable struggles which gain
Order thro' waste and thro' wear.
Till the mastodon stalks forth in might with hoof and with jaw,
And the law of the Higher prevails, the Ultimate Law,

And the cooler earth teems with life, on land and in sea :
Life organic in beast, fish, or bird, in herb or in tree,
Life dominant, life exulting with quick-coming breath,
Life that fades down and sinks in the silence and slumber of Death.
But no soul to mark the struggle nor thought which might turn
To whence those weird fires burn.
Successions, progressions, a scheme of insensible life,
One Will alone directing the infinite strife,
One Force, one Eye, one Sole and Regarding Mind,
In a Universe deaf and blind !

And was it some Inner Law,
Some hidden potency of Force,
Or some creative breath Divine
Which sped the creature on its upward course ?

Until at last it woke and saw.
With visual forces fine,
The Godhead that was round it everywhere,
The spiritual essence fair,
Which doth innerve this outward show of things—
And filled the brute with high imaginings,
And winging it with new-found wings
Lifted its aspect to the infinite sky,
Where, in the light of the Creative Eye,
Its ancient slough away it cast,
And rose to Man at last!

How know we or can trace
The first beginnings of all Time,
Who know not yet indeed how this our race
Rises to heights sublime?
In darkness does our life begin,
Hidden and fenced within.

In darkness and obscurity
Dwell the blind germs which yet shall be.
In darkness the slow rolling months fulfil
The pre-ordained will.
And even in childhood's earliest days,
No memory-haunted ways
Take our first footsteps; but in deep
And unremembered tracts of sleep
The immature creature dwells, nor can recall
Its former self or primal state at all.

THE ODE OF INFANCY.

THE ODE OF INFANCY.

Oh, little child !
Stretched on thy mother's knees, with steadfast gaze
And innocent aspect mild,
Viewing this novel scene in mute amaze,
Following the moving light, thy mother's smile,
And storing up the while
New precious knowledge till thou com'st to be
Sage it may be or clown—
Soaring or sinking down,
To topmost heights of weal or depths of misery ;
How shall I dare to mark thy innocent look,
And write as in a book

Thy infinite possibilities of life ;
What fate awaits thee in the coming strife,
What joys, what triumphs in the growing years,
What depths of woe and tears ?

I see thee lie
Safe in thy silken cradle, sunk in down,
Within thy father's palace-chambers fair ;
Thy guarded slumbers breathing tempered air
The soft eyes, full of yearning, watching by ;
Caressing arms waiting thy waking cry ;
All luxury and state which can assuage
Life's painful heritage ;
The prayers of a people swell for thee
Up to the careless skies which cover all.
And yet it may be thine to fall
Far from thy loved and native land,
And end thy imperfect, innocent life-tale here,

Forsaken on a savage desert strand,
Pierced through and through by some barbarian spear.

I see thy tiny face
Pale, worn with hunger, and large hollow eyes,
Upon the frozen way-side laid
Stiffening in thy dead mother's cold embrace.
I hear thy piteous cries
When the sot flings thee down with limbs that bleed—
Flings thee, and takes no heed;
Weak, helpless, born to misery, girt round
With vice and sin and shame, in sight and sound.
Poor life foredoomed, already sunk and lost;
Too often sent to tread the ways of death
With childish failing breath;
Yet ofttimes holding power
To bloom a virgin flower
Upon the untrodden heights closed to the multitude,
Among the wise and good.

Or with brown face thou comest and limb,
Naked, on the warm soil that bears the palm;
Or haply the young heir of all the dim
And half-forgotten realms whose ruins stand
Sown lion-haunted on the deathlike calm
Which wraps the Egyptian or Assyrian sand,
Reared 'midst the dust of empires; or art now
As through all history thou wert, the child
Of savage parents, rude and wild,
Springing and falling; born to flower and seed,
Or sink upon the uncaring earth, a weed
Trodden by the pitiless feet of cruel men
With hearts that ape the tiger's; or art born
In the old, old empire, which hath long outworn
God and the hopes of man, and yet coheres,
Propped by its own far-reaching bulk, as when
It did emerge from savagery and grew,

Oh, child ! as yet may you,
To worldly strength, and knowledge, and dead lore
Of wisdom fled before,
And dull content, and soulless hopes and fears.

Wherever thou mayest be,
To me thou art wonderful and strange to see—
Busied with trifles, rapt with simple toys,
As men with graver joys.
I hear thy lisping accents slowly reach
The miracle of speech;
I mark thy innocent smile;
I treasure up each baby wile
Which smooths the brow of thought, the front of care.
Thou royal scion, born to be the heir
Of all the unrecorded days, since first
Man rose to his full being, once blest, and then accurst !

In weal and woe and ill
Thou art a miracle still.
From snow-bound hut to equatorial strand,
Above thee still regarding angels stand;
While thy brief life-tale passes like a dream
Across Creation's glass.
Dark powers of ill press thee on either side,
As now thy swift years pass,
Revealing on thy young soul's tablets white
The eternal characters of Right;
Or sometimes with the growing years grown strong
The unhallowed signs of wrong.

Oh, little child! thou bringest with thee still,
As Moses, parting from the fiery hill,
Some dim reflection in thine eyes,
Some sense of Godhead, some indefinite wonder
As of one drifted here unwillingly;

Who knows no speech of ours, and yet doth keep
Some dumb remembrance of a gracious home
Which lights his waking hours and fills his sleep
With precious visions which unbidden come;
Some golden link which nought of earth can sunder,
Some glimpse of a more glorious land and sea!

Oh, precious vision fleeting past!
Oh, age too fair to last!
For soon new gifts and powers are thine,
And growing springs and summers bring
Boyhood or girlhood hastening,
And nerve the agile limb, and teach,
With the new gift of speech,
The wonders that stand round on every side,
And Life's imperial portals opening gradually wide.

THE ODE OF CHILDHOOD.

THE ODE OF CHILDHOOD.

I. Boyhood.

Fair budding age,
Which next upon life's stage
Passest a fairy dream before the eyes,
High health and bounding limb,
Eager and stretching towards the wished-for prize;
Whate'er the passing care that takes thy thought,
I catch the sweet brisk scent of trodden grass
When through the golden afternoon
Of a long day in June,
Until the twilight dim,

The playfield echoes with the joyous noise
Of troops of agile boys,
Who, bare-armed, throw the rapid-bounding ball;
Who shout and race and fall.
I see the warm pool fringed with meadow-sweet,
Where stream in summer, with eager feet
Through gold of buttercups and crested grass,
The gay processions stripping as they pass.
I hear the cool and glassy depths divide
As the bold fair young bodies, far more fair
Than ever sculptured Nereids were,
Plunge fearless down, or push, with front or side,
Through the caressing wave.
I mark the deadly chill, thro' the young blood,
When some young life, snatched from the cruel flood,
Looks once upon the flowers, the fields, the sun,—
Looks once, and then is done!
Or the grey, frosty field, and the great ball

Urged on by flying feet.
Or when the skate rings on the frozen lake,
The gliding phantoms fleet,
Rosy with health, and laughing though they fall.
Or by the rapid stream or swirling pool,
The fisher, with his pliant wand.
Or by the covert-side, taking his stand,
The shooter, watching patient hour by hour,
With that hard youthful heart that young breasts hold,
Till the fur glances through the brake;
As when our savage sires wandered of old,
Hungering through primal wastes. I see them all,
The brisk, swift days of youth, which cares for nought
But for the joy of living; scarce a thought
Of Love, or Knowledge, or at best
Such labour as gives zest
To the great joy of living. Oh, blest time!
For which each passing hour rings out a chime

Of joy-bells all the year; ay, tho' through days
Of ill thou farest, and unhappy ways;
Or whether on the sun-struck lands thy feet
Are the young savage hunter's, lithe and fleet;
Turning at night-fall to thy father's cot,
Bathed in the full white moonlight; or dost stand
'Mid the hushed plains of some forsaken land;—
Where'er thou art, oh, boyhood! thou art free
And fresh as the young breeze in summer born
On sun-kissed hills or on the laughing sea,
Or gay bird-music breathing of the morn,
Or some sweet rose-bud pearled with early dew,
As brief and fair as you.

II. Girlhood.

Or in another channel still more sweet,
Life's current flows along,
Ere yet the tide of passion, full and strong,
Hurries the maiden's feet.
Oh, sweet and early girlish years
Of innocent hopes and fears!
Busied with fancies bright and gay,
Which Love shall chase away,
When, with the flutter of celestial wings,
He stirs the soul forth from its depths, and brings

Healing from trouble. Oh, deep well
Of fairy fancies undefiled!
Oh, sweet and innocent child!

Now with thy doll I see thee full of care,
Or filled already with the mother's air,
Hushing thy child to sleep.
And now thyself immersed in slumbers, deep
Yet light, I see thee lie.
And now the singer, lifting a clear voice
In soaring hymns or carols that rejoice,
Or busied with thy seam, or doubly fair
For the unconscious rapture of thy look
Lost in some simple book.
Whate'er the colour of thy face,
Thou art fulfilled with grace.
Oh, little maiden, fair or brown!
Thine is the simple beauty which doth crown

The dreams of happy fathers, who have past
By Love and Passion, and have come
To know pure joys of home;
And for the hurry and haste of younger years,
Have taken the hearth that cheers,
And the fair realm of duty, and delight
Of innocent faces bright,
And the sweet wells of deep untroubled love
A daughter's name can move.

In every clime and age I see thee still,
Since the rude nomads wandered forth at will
Upon the unbounded Aryan pastures wild—
There thou wert, oh, fair child!
"The milker" 'twas they called thee; all day long
Tending the browsing herds with high-voiced song;
Or on some sun-warmed place
Upon the flower-faced grass,

Watching the old clouds pass,
And weaving wreaths with such wild grace
And sprightly girlish glee
As Proserpine did once in sunny Sicily.

Or maybe by some widowed hearth—
The fairest, saddest sight on earth,
Filled too soon with sweet care,
And bringing back the voice and air
Of thy dead mother; thou art set
An innocent virgin-mother, childlike yet.
Thy baby sisters on thy loving arm
Sleep fast, secure from harm.
Thou hast no time for game or toy,
Or other thought but this;
Who findest thy full reward, thy chiefest joy,
In thy fond father's kiss.

Or under palms to-day,
Thy childhood fleets away;
Or by the broadening shadow hid,
Of tomb or pyramid;
In stainless whiteness; or maybe
Forlorn in haunts of misery;
Thou keepest on thy rounded face
Some unforgotten trace
Of the old primal days unsung,
Of the fresh breezes of pure morn
When the first maiden-child was born,
And Time was young.

Fair streams which run as yet
Each in its separate channel from the snows;

Boyhood and girlhood; while Life's banks are set
With blooms that kiss the clear lymph as it flows,
One swift and strong and deep.
One where the lilies sleep;—
Fair streams, which soon some stress of Life and Time
Shall bring together,
Under new magical skies and the strange weather
Of an enchanted clime.

THE ODE OF YOUTH.

THE ODE OF YOUTH.

Now upon the tree of life there rise
Before our wondering eyes
Two strange new flowers of varied hue.
The tree is grown,
The flowers are blown,
There is nought wanting to its early sweetness;
But with a fair completeness,
The purple bloom and white
Fill the entranced, admiring sight.
The tree is grown, the tree is strong;
Oh! dear to art and song!

Fair time of Flowers ! within whose chalice sweet
Lurks Youth with rosy feet,
And Love with purple folded wing,
And birdlike thoughts that sing.

I. Early Manhood.

And first, oh youth, I see thee with the plume
Of thy thick locks upon thy forehead set,
And thy frank eyes kindling with fire, or dim
With soaring thoughts of heaven, or wet
With kindly dews of pity; the straight limb
And the strong arm, and force that never tires;
The cheek and lip touched with the early down
Of manhood's fullest crown;
The heart, which hardly thought of passion fires;
The mind, which opens like a flower in spring
To all the wanton airs the seasons bring;—
The young existence self-contained no longer,

But pressing outward hour by hour,
Fired with a thirst continually stronger,
For some supreme white flower.
Whatever be the prize—
Whether upon the difficult heights of Thought,
Or 'midst the white laborious dust of Duty,
Or on the peaks of Power, the bloom be sought,
Or in the flush and thrill of the new Beauty
Born of a maiden's eyes.

Oh, happiest age of all!
When hope is without measure,
And life a thrill of pleasure,
And health is high and force unspent,
Nor Disappointment yet, nor sordid Care,
Nor yet Satiety, nor the cold chill
Which creeps upon the world-worn heart to kill
All higher hope, and leaves us to despair.

Nor doubt of God or men can touch, but all
The garden ground of Life is opened wide;
And lo! on every side
The flowers of spring are blooming, and the air
Is scented, and sweet song is everywhere,
And young eyes read from an enchanted book,
With rapt entrancèd look,
Loves legend and the Dream of days to be,
And fables fair of Life's mythology,
Rapt hour by hour till dewy twilight fall.

Whatever be the page—
Whether on metaphysical riddles faint,
Or the rapt visions of some far-off seer,
The burning thoughts of saint,
Or maxims of the sage—
Thou comest, oh youth, with thought as sure,
With mind severe and pure;

Thou takest afresh, with each returning year,
The fair thin dreams, the philosophic lore
Of the great names of yore—
Plato the wise, Confucius, Socrates,
The blest Gautama—all are thine;
Upon thee year by year the words divine
Of our great Master, falling like the dew,
Fill thee, to hate the wrong, to love the true
For thee the fair poetic page is spread
Of the great living and the greater dead;
For thee the glorious gains of Science lie
Stretched open to thine eye;
And to thy fresh and undimmed brain,
The mysteries of Number and of Space
Seem easy to explain;
Thou lookest with clear gaze upon the long
Confusions of the Race, the paradox of Wrong;
And dost not fear to trace,

With youth's strong fiery faith that knows no chill,
The secret of Transgression, the prime source
Of Good and Evil, and the unfailing course
Of the Ineffable Will.

And sometimes life, glowing with too fierce fire,
O'er sea and land in rapid chase,
Snatches thee with tumultuous will,
And careless, breathless pace.
Sometimes a subtle flame
Comes on thee as a shadow of night,
Marring thy young life's white,
And some strange thrill thou knowest without a name,
And at thy side shamefast Desire
Stands unreproved and guides thy bashful feet
To where, girt by dim depths of solitude,
Sits Fancy, disarrayed, in a deep wood;
And oh, but Youth runs swift and Pleasure is sweet!

And sometimes, too, looking with too bold eye
Upon the unclouded sky,
Sudden the heavens are hidden, and the great Sun
Sinks as if day were done,
And the brain reels and all the life grows faint,
Smitten by too much light; or a thick haze
Born out of sense doth overcloud
The soul, and leaves it blind and in amaze,
And the young heart is dull and the young brain
Dark till God shine again.

Oh, fairest age of all!
Whate'er thy race or clime,
To-day ten thousand cities on thee call,
Broad plain and palm-fringed isle.
Thine is the swelling life, the eager glance and smile,
Oh, precious fruit of Life and Time!

Oh, worker of the world ! to whose young arm
The brute earth yields and wrong, as to a charm ;
Young seaman, soldier, student, toiler at the plough,
Or loom, or forge, or mine, a kingly growth art thou !
Where'er thou art, though earthy oft and coarse,
Thou bearest with thee hidden springs of force,
Creative power, the flower, the fruitful strife,
The germ, the potency of Life,
Which draws all things to thee unwittingly.
The Future lies within thy loins, and all the Days to be
To thee Time giveth to beget,
The Thought that shall redeem and lift man higher yet.

II. Maidenhood.

But lo ! another form appears
Upon the glass. Oh, pure and white !
Oh, delicate and bright !
Oh, primal growth of Time !
Sweet maidenhood ! that to a silvery chime
Of music, and chaste fancies undefiled,
And modest grace and mild,
Comëst, best gift of God to men,
As fair to-day as when
The first man, waking from his deep
And fancy-haunted sleep,

Found his strength spent, and at his side
His fair dream glorified;
High-soaring note, keeping the eternal song
Through secular discords long.
Oh, lily of Life's garden! fair of hue
And sweet of scent, watered with heaven's own dew
Fair being, that holdest hidden motherhood
And undeveloped good;
Implicit in thee, even as white blooms hold
Their fragrant globes of gold,
Men know no praise they can withhold from thee,
Oh, sweet virginity!
Since Artemis first trod the youngling earth.
Thou glorious and surpassing birth!
The Vestal fires were thine, the convents cold
Are thine as those of old.
To thee, when strong sweet flowers of Life and Sense,
Scent gross, we turn, oh white and gracious innocence!

Yea, still, while life flows fast and free,
To thee we turn a world-worn eye.
Throbbing delights are youth's and pulses high ;
Yet sometimes these will pall, and then to thee
We turn, oh fair pale lily, clothed with purity !

For sure it is indeed
Two streams through Life's ground flow, and both are good—
The one whose goal is gracious motherhood ;
The other in the cloister pale and dim
Finding sufficient meed
In pure observance, rite, and soaring hymn.
We may not blame nor hold them wrong
Who through their lives their liturgies prolong,
Even though the prize of motherhood be great.
But always thine, oh, blest estate !
Thine it is, even in youth's hot sun, to keep
Celestial snows and pure abysses deep.

I see thy fair expanding mind,
A precious blossom parcel-blown,
Not with the young man's ardent rage,
But with a gentler radiance all thy own,
Fixed now on history's fabled page,
Now on the bard's divinest thought,
And now by some deep music stirred,
Deeper than any spoken word,
Or sweet love-story soft as southern wind.

Dear flower and fair to mortal eye,
Whatever be thy age, thy clime, thy race,
Whether the gentle curve of thy young breast
Be hidden in white lawn or stand confest
In innocent brown nakedness and grace,
Thou art the high and unattained prize
Of all the generations that have been;
Upon Life's throne thou sittest as a Queen,

And at thy gracious feet
The ages kneel to thy eternal Truth.
Thy pure and spotless innocence,
And free from stain of Time and Sense,
Thy undefilèd youth.

White flower of Life's tree,
Love like a wanton bee,
Shall fly to thee, and from thy deep cold cells
Rifle the honey. Tranquil stream,
That from the chill heart of the untrodden snow,
So calm and clear dost flow;
Spring wakes beneath the gleam
Of a new sun which swells
A warm and rapid torrent strong,
Soon in the sunny balmy weather,
To break its banks and bear together
Your mingled streams along.

THE ODE OF LOVE.

THE ODE OF LOVE.

I am afraid
To sing thee, oh Immortal Love, who know
By what majestic voices long ago
Thy eulogy was said.
I do not dare
To bring a voice which thou didst never train,
To the high-soaring difficult air
Of thy celestial strain.
Yet how of Life to sing, and yet not tell of Love;
And since thou art the source of song,
And all our hearts dost move,
I will essay thy praise nor fear to do thee wrong.

For see, the lovers go
With lingering steps and slow,
By dim arcades where sunbeams scarcely reach;
On sea-struck northern beach;
Or breathless tropic strand,
By evening breezes fanned;
Or through the thick life-laden air
Of some great city; or through the hush
Of summer twilights 'midst the corn;
When all the dying heavens glow and blush
Or the young moonlight curves its crescent horn.

Oh, wondrous bond that binds
In one sweet concord separate minds,
And from their union gives
To the rapt gazer's eye
A finer essence and more high

A young and wingèd God, who lives
In purer air and seeks a loftier sky!
If growing cares and lower aims should banish
All thought of heavenly hopes and higher things,
While we can mount upon thy soaring wings
They shall not wholly vanish.
Thou art the immortal part of man, the soul,
Which, scorning earth's control,
Lifts us from selfish thought and grovelling gains.
Thou always, whilst thy power remains,
Canst pierce the dull dead weight of cloud,
By which our thought is bowed,
And raise our clear and cleansëd eyes
To the eternal skies.

No sting of sense it is
That gives thee wing and lifts thee to the heaven.
Too high art thou for this;

Ethereal, pure, free from earth's grosser leaven.
If ought of sense be thine, it is the air,
Whose weight can lift thee up to soar,
Which can thy heavenward pinions bear
From brute earth more and more
Up to the fount of Power and Love
Whence all things move.

And see, the lovers go
With lingering steps and slow,
Over all the world together, all in all,
Over all the world! The empires fall;
The onward march of Man seems spent;
The nations rot in dull content;
The blight of war, a bitter flood,
From continent to continent,
Rolls on with waves of blood;
The light of knowledge sinks, the fire of thought burns low;

There seems scant thought of God; but yet
One power there is men ne'er forget,
And still through every land beneath the skies,
Rapt, careless, looking in each other's eyes,
With lingering steps and slow,
The lovers go.

A pillar of light
Goes evermore before their dazzled eyes.
Purple and golden-bright,
Youth's vast horizons spread and the unbounded skies.
Oh blessèd dream which for awhile dost hide
The sorrows of the world and leave life glorified!
Oh blessed light that risest still,
Young eyes and souls to fill!

Linked arms and hearts aglow;
Wherever man is more than brute,

To this self-sacrifice our natures grow.
Rapt each in each they go, and mute,
Listening to the sweet song
Which Love, with unheard accents, all day long
Sings to them, like a hidden bird,
Sweeter than e'er was seen or heard,
Which from life's thick-leaved tree
Sings sadly, merrily,
A strange, mixed song, a mystic strain,
Which rises now to joy and jollity,
Now seemeth to complain;
But with a sweeter music far than is
Of earthborn melodies.

He sees within her eyes
That which his nature needs to be complete—
The grace, the pureness, the diviner sweet,
Which to rude souls and strong our Life denies;

The vision of his nightly dream ;
More pure than e'er did seem
The Nymphs of old, by wood, or hill, or stream.

She views in him the strong
Deep note which adds the fulness to life's song ;
High aims and thoughts that glow
She does not dream, she cannot know
What turbid forces rude and wild
Sully his youth's tumultuous flow ;
She, full of virgin fancies, pale and mild.

They draw to each other ; they flow to the deep as one,
Together thro' all lands beneath the sun,
In twin attempered streams, set side by side,
So near that scarce a footpace may divide
Their separate depths, and this maybe is best ,
Or maybe in each other lost,

In calm or tempest-tost,
One broad full river they roll on to the sea,
One full accordant harmony,
High song and deep, one perfect note;
Or maybe troubled as the wintry wave,
Or some hoarse accent of a tuneless throat,
They know no longer peace or rest,
Ill-mated, hapless, self-opprest,
Till silent in the grave.

Yet draw together, draw together still,
Fair souls and free, fair souls and young!
Still shall thy praise, Immortal Love, be sung!
Thou art the Spirit which doth animate;
The Universal Will,
Which speeds the Race upon the ways of Fate;
Which speeds it onwards, gaining strength
Little by little, line on line,

Till, as our hope is, risen at length
To plenitude Divine,
It comes to what high issue rare
The Future shall prepare.

THE ODE OF PERFECT YEARS.

THE ODE OF PERFECT YEARS.

Now flower and perfect fruit
Together dress the tree,
High midsummer has come, midsummer mute
Of song, but rich to scent and sight.
The sun is high in heaven, the skies are bright
And full of blessedness,
High hope and wild endeavour
Have fled or sunk for ever;
Only the swifter seasons onward press,
And every day that goes
Is a full-scented, full-blown garden rose,
Orbèd, complete.

And every hour brings its own burden sweet
Of daily duty, precious care;
Wherefrom the visible landscape calm and clear
Shows finer far, and the high heaven more near,
Than ever morning skies of sunrise were.

I miss the unbounded hope of old,
The freshness and the glow of youth;
I miss the fever and the fret,
The luminous haze of gold.
I see a mind clearer and calmer yet,
A more unselfish love, a more unclouded truth;
Such gain I take, and this
More gracious shows and fair than that I miss.

I. Fatherhood.

Oh, father! sitting at thy hearth,
With sunny heads around and lisping talk,
For whom the world without and all the earth
Is nought to this; and to the strong deep love
Which, mixed with pity, all thy soul doth move.
Strong worker, watching o'er the tottering walk
And feeble limbs and growing thought and brain,
Rejoicing in each new-found gain
As the first sire, alone in Paradise;
And patient and content to work all day,
If with the eve returning from thy toil
Thou canst put off the sad world's stain and soil,

And bending downward to thy children's eyes,
Rise cleansed and pure as they.
I know not if life holds a more divine
Or fairer lot than thine.
Strong, patient worker, king of those who can
To its high goal of Things to be,
Its goal of Fate and Mystery,
Lead forth the race of Man!

Thy way is ofttimes hard,
And toilsome oft thy feet;
Thine are the days of anxious care,
When the spent brain reels, or the strong arm tires;
Yet all the ease and charm of days that were,
And pleasure paling all their fading fires,
Allure no more, but the tired hunter now,
Or now the worker with the furrowed brow
On frozen wastes or sun-struck thou dost show;

By mart, or loom, or mine, or bending down
Chained to thy desk within the stifling town,
Thou toilest daily that thy brood may live.
Cares are thine, cares, and the unselfish mind
Which spends itself for others and can find
How blest it is without return to give.
Whate'er thy race or speech, thou art the same ;
Before thy eyes Duty, a constant flame,
Shines always steadfast with unchanging light,
Through dark days and through bright.

Sometimes, by too great misery bowed down,
Or poison-draughts brought lower than the beast,
Thou comest to hate the hollow eyes around,
Dreading thy cares increased,
And dost despise thy own,
And canst thy dead heart steel against their cries,
And mark unmoved the hunger in their eyes ;

Or sometimes, filled with love, art powerless to aid.
Oh, misery, to make our souls afraid !

Or if a happier lot
Await thee, yet by precious wells of tears
Thy life's road goes, vain hopes and anxious fears.
Thine 'tis, perchance, to mark the grassy mound
Which keeps, within the churchyard's narrow ground,
Thy darling who is not.
Hopes sunk in tears, tears that ascend to hope ;
Such is thy horoscope,
Oh father, standing by the little grave,
And impotent to save !

Thy heart is moved with pity
For thy young growing lives, who come
To leave the safe and sacred walls of home ;
For whose young souls, Life, like a cruel city,

Spreads out her nets of sin.
Thou knowest well of old
The strong allurements which they scarce may shun,
The subtle wiles, the innocent lives undone,
The tide of passion, scorning all control,
And thou art filled with an immense despair,
Wherefrom thy heart beats slow, thy eyes grow dim,
As when of yore thou heardst them lisp a hymn
With early childish lips: thou canst not bear
To think of that young whiteness soiled and foul,
Or that thick darkness blotting the young soul.

Yet from thy grief and pain
Comes ofttimes greater gain
Than all thy loss.
Thou knowest what it is to grieve,
And from the burden of thy cross
Thou comest to believe.

Thou who hast lost and yet dost love,
Thou, too, a Father hast in some dim sphere above,
Who doth regard thy joys, thy miseries,
Thy petty doubts of Him, thy feeble learning,
Thy faults, thy pains, thy childish doubt and yearning,
Even as thou dost these.

II. Motherhood.

But here is one who over all the earth
Is worshipped and is blest,
Who doth rejoice from holier springs of mirth,
And sorrows from a deeper fount of tears,
On whose sweet bosom is our earliest rest,
Whose tender voice that cheers
Is our first memory, which still doth last
Thro' all our later past—
The love of love or child, the world-worn strife,
The turmoil and the triumphs of a life—
The sweet maid-mother, pure and mild,
The deep love undefiled.

Thou art the universal praise
Of every human heart, the secret shrine
Where seer and savage keep a dream divine
Through growing and declining days;
And but for thee
And thy unselfish love, thy sacrifice,
Which brings heaven daily nearer to our eyes,
Men whom the rude world stains, men chilled by doubt,
Would find no ray of Deity
To fire a Faith gone out.

Our life from a twofold root
Springs upwards to the sky,
One, surface only, shared with tree and brute,
And one, as deep and strong as heaven is high.
Spirit and sense,
Each bears its part and dwells in innocence

Yet only grown together can they bear
The one consummate fruit.
The flower is good, the flower is fair,
But holds no lasting sweetness in its petals thin,
No seed of life within.
But the ripe fruit within its orbèd gold
Doth hidden secrets hold;
Within its honied wells set safe and deep,
The Future lies asleep.
Of shamefastness our being is born,
Of shamefastness and scorn.

Oh, wonder, that so high dost soar!
Oh, vision, blest for evermore!
With every throe of birth
Two glorious Presences make glad the earth:
The stainless mother and the Eternal Child.
Of the heart comes love, of the heart and not the brain

To heights where Thought comes not can Love attain :
We cannot tell at all, we may not know,
How to such stature high our lower natures grow ;
What strong instinctive thrill
The mother's being doth fill,
And raises it from miry common ways,
Up to such heights of love.
We cannot tell what blessed forces move,
And so transform the careless girlish heart
To bear so high a part.
We cannot tell ; we can but praise.

Fair motherhood, by every childish tongue
Thy eulogy is sung.
In every passing age
The theme of seer and sage :
The painters saw thee in a life-long dream ;
The painters who have left a world more fair

Than ever days of nymph and goddess were—
Blest company, who now for centuries
Have fixed the virgin mother for our eyes—
The painters saw thee sitting brown or fair,
Amid the Tuscan vines or colder Northern air;
They saw the love shine from thy peasant gaze;
They saw thy reverent look, thy young amaze
And left thee Queen of Heaven, wearing a crown
Of glory; and abased at thy sweet breast,
Spurning his robes of kingship down,
The God-child laid at rest.

They found thee, and they fixed thee for our eyes;
But every day that goes
Before the gazer new Madonnas rise.
What matter if the cheek show not the rose,
Nor eyes divine are there nor queenly grace?
The mother's glory lights the homely face.

In every land beneath the circling sun
Thy praise is never done.
Whatever men may doubt, they put their trust in thee;
Rude souls and coarse, to whom virginity
Seems a dead thing and cold.
So always was it from the days of old;
So shall it be while yet our race doth last;
Though truth be sought no more and faith be past,
Still, till all hope of heaven be dead,
Thy praises shall be said.

Aye, thou art ours, or wert, ere yet
The loss we ne'er forget,
The loss which comes to all who reach life's middle way.
We see thee by the childish bed
Sit patient all night long,
To cool the parching lips or throbbing head;
We hear thee still with simple song

Or sweet hymn lull the wakeful eyes to sleep;
Through every turning of life's chequered page,
Joying with those who joy, weeping with those who weep.
Oh, sainted love! oh, precious sacrifice!
Oh, heaven-lighted eyes!
Best dream of early youth, best memory of age!

III. Labour.

They do the Maker wrong
Who with the closing days of youth
Shut fast the gate of Song ;
Nor ever can I hold it truth,
With those who feign to tell the tale of life,
That only love is worth, the love that binds
A youth and maid, nor care at all
For the long summer ere the fruit shall fall,
And hold not fit for song the glorious strife,
The joy of toil and thought, the clash of vigorous minds,
When knowledge flies before, and we pursue,
And who the Fair once followed, follow now the True.

Ah, full fair life! if something we have lost,
If never more again
We feel the ancient joy, the former pain,
If no more passion-tost
Upon the tides of life we hurry by,
The white waves laughing as we plunge along,
Nor watch the light clouds drift along the sky,
While the glad South snatches us swift and strong
To some blest isle beyond the purple wave,
Where Love is Queen and Mirth, nor Prudence grave
Nor Wisdom frowns, but to be glad is all,
From jocund morn till dewy evening fall;
Oh, if that sky is dark—those winds are still—
Another day has risen: again from the East
Our treasure is increased;
And as the orient Lord begins to grow,
New airs begin to blow,

And on the calm majestic tide
Our full-sailed galleon comes to glide,
Love, with its little skiff, has gone,
But Life's great bark sails on.

Toil is the law of life, and its best fruit;
This from the uncaring brute
Divides;—this and the prescient mind whose store
Grows daily more and more.
Toil is the mother of wealth,
The nurse of health;
Toil 'tis that gives the zest
To well-earned rest;
The law of life laid broad and deep
As are the fixed foundations of the sea,
The medicine of grief, the remedy,
Wherefrom Life giveth his beloved sleep.

Oh, labour truly blest!
Thou rulest all the race;
Over all the toiling earth I see thy gracious face
Stand forth confest.
Wherever thou art least,
In those fair lands beneath the [illegible],
The slothful savage, likened to the beast,
Drags on his soulless length of days;
Where most thou art,
Man rises upward to a loftier height,
And views the earth and heaven with clearer sight,
And holds a cleaner heart.

I see the toilers with the awaking morn,
Ere yet the day is born,
Go forth to labour over all the earth.
In northern darkness, 'midst the wintry rain,
The great bell clangs thro' the smoke-laden air;

And ere light comes the workers gather there,
While the great engines throb, the swift wheels turn,
And the long, sickly gaslights flare and burn;
I hear the slow winch creak above the pit,
While the black workers, who have toiled all night,
Rise, dazed, to rest and light;
I see the fisher on the waking sea;
The great ship, full-manned, heaving silently
Across the foam; reapers in yellow corn;
The frosty shepherd in the early morn;
The naked worker bent among the cane
Or cotton; the vinedresser, lean and brown;
The thousand labours of the busy town;
The myriad trades which in each clime and race
Build up man's dwelling-place;
I see the countless toiling multitude;
And all I see is good.

But to ends nobler still
The nobler workers of the world are bent.
It is not best in an inglorious ease
To sink and dull content,
When wild revolts and hopeless miseries
The unquiet nations fill;
It is not best to rot
In dull observance, while the bitter cry
Of weak and friendless sufferers rends the sky,
Wailing their hopeless lot;
Or rest in coward fear on former gain,
Making old joys supply the present pain.

Nay, best it is indeed
To spend ourselves upon the general good;
And, oft misunderstood,
To strive to lift the knees and limbs that bleed;—
This is the best, the fullest meed.

Let ignorance assail or hatred sneer;
Who loves his race he shall not fear;
He suffers not for long,
Who doth his soul possess in loving, and grows strong.

Oh, student! far into the night
From youth to age
Bent low upon the blinding page,
Content to catch some gleam of light;
Art thou not happy, though the world pass by?—
Happy though Honours seek thee not, nor Fame,
And no man knows thy name?—
Happy in that blest company of old
Whose names are writ in characters of gold
Upon the rocks of Time, the glorious band
Who on the shining mountains stand,
Thinker and jurist, bard or seer,
Whatever name is brightest and most dear?

Or thou with docile hand,
Obedient to the visionary eye,
Who 'midst art's precious work dost choose to stand
Amid the great ones of the days gone by.
Oh, blest and glorious lot, always to be
With dreams of beauty compassed round about!
The godlike mother and the child divine,
Or land or sea or sky, in calm or storm,
Nature's sincerest verities of form—
To see from canvas or from marble shine,
Little by little orbing gradually,
Some trace of hidden Godhead gleaming out!

Or who, from heart and brain inspired, create,
Defying time, defying fate,
Some deathless theme and high,
Some verse which cannot die,

Some lesson which shall still be said
Altho' their tongue be lost and dead;
Or who, in daily labour's trivial round,
Their fitting work have found;
Or who on high, guiding the car of State,
Are set, a people's envy and their pride,
Who, spurning rank and ease and wealth,
And setting pleasure aside and health,
And meeting contumely oft and hate,
Have lived laborious lives and all too early died.

Or shall I silence keep,
Of you, oh ministering women fair,
Who, while the world lies sunk in careless sleep,
Still for the love of God and man can bear
To watch by alien sick-beds, and to guard
With little hope and scant reward,
'Midst misery and foul infected air,

The friendless and the dying? Shall I dare
To sing of labour's meed, nor hold you dear?
Dear souls, your joys are great, and yet not wholly here;
In heaven they blossom best and grow complete,
And beautiful upon the eternal mountains are your feet.

Ay, labour, thou art blest.
From all the earth, thy voice, a constant prayer,
Soars upward day and night:
A voice of aspiration after right;
A voice of effort yearning for its rest;
A voice of high hope conquering despair!

IV. Rest.

There is a joy in rest;
There is a joy to cease and to be still.
This is the remedy of all the best,
To cure the pain of too laborious will.
Ah! it is sweet to lie reclined,
Reaping the fallow mind,
When all the sweat and drouth of day is done,
And a cool breeze breathes from the setting sun.

The toiler sits before his cottage door,
Set with musk-roses round, and eglantine,

In dewy, scented, twilight-glooms divine,
When all the trouble of the week is o'er,
And sabbath rest comes with the evening sun:
The joyous shouts come up from pool or green;
Round the white chestnut-spikes the beetles hum;
And down the hawthorn-haunted by-ways come
The loitering lovers, hardly seen
Till springs aloft the clear, large moon
Of pleasant June.

Or by the palm-thatched hut at shut of eve,
The dusky toilers lie, when the red sun
Is sinking or has gone.
A cool wind rises landward from the sea;
The fire-flies glance like silver in the palm;
On the fringed shore the thundering rollers heave;
And all the simple souls are full of glee,
And the fair earth of calm.

Or on the hot and trackless sand,
In the sweet dying day,
Beyond the unknown monuments of the dead,
The last muezzin calls, the prayers are said,
And turbaned faces stern relax a while
To some unwonted smile,
Watching the large-eyed children at their play.

Or maybe busy brains, which day by day
Life's struggle frets away,
Weary with fierce pursuit of fame or wea
And prizing only health;
Over the joyous wave in some swift boa
White-winged, delight to float
From land to land upon the tideless sea
Borne careless still and free
By hoary cape and gleaming southern town,
And many an islet clothed with palm and vine,

And on the wine-dark sea-depths looking down,
High based on wave-worn fronts, the marble shrine;
Or see the white town flush with dying day,
And the red mountain fire the glimmering bay.

Or maybe on the icy hill they creep
Above the pines, across the frozen sea,
Whose blue abysses bare the unfathomed deep;
Each to the other bound, and silently,
Fearful lest some chance step or spoken word,
The avalanche trembling to its fall have stirred;
And up the giddy height
Little by little, gaining slow,
They gradually go,
Till with hard toil of knee and hand,
On the white summit panting but content,
With full hearts throbbing high and forces spent,
At last the climbers stand;

For this of old is sure,
That change of toil is toil's sufficient cure.

Or by the lovely classic shore,
The traveller sees with wondering eyes
The treasure-house of art; the store
Of gracious memories
Left by some cunning vanished hand,
At whose supreme command
The spirit of beauty rose and did appear:
The angel with the lily; the poor maid,
Submissive, yet afraid;
The fair Madonnas mild;
The deep ineffable Child;
The sweet boy-angels singing high and clear;
The lady with the mystic smile;
The kneeling Magi from the fabled East;
The blessed Presence at the sacred feast;

And many a virgin martyr sweet,
And many a youthful saint,
Gazing from heavenly eyes and free of guile;
Who, when the tortured life began to faint,
Looking in agony above,
Saw the heavens opened, and the Paraclete
Descending like a dove.

Or maybe under secular trees,
Old when his ancestors were young,
The statesman, in the golden autumn, sees
New glories for the eloquent tongue,
New triumphs gained against the banded might
Of selfishness and fear, new struggles for the right;
And in the falling evening and the sad
Short light of waning days,
Illumes his soul with subtle inward rays,
And grows sedately glad.

These thy refreshments are, oh blest
And necessary Rest!
Peaceful delights, which bear not soil and fret
As do the victories of toil, and yet
Bear their own fruit exceeding fair:
Renewal of the labouring mind,
New hopes, new dawns, and carking care
A black night left behind.

THE ODE OF GOOD

THE ODE OF GOOD.

Eternal Spring, and Source
Of happiness and weal!
Indwelling and unfailing Force!
Who dost Thyself reveal
In every jocund day, and restful night;
In every dawn serenely bright;
In every tide of yearning which doth roll,
Heavenward, some growing soul

What were life save for Thee
But pain and misery—

To have no more longing, but to be
Below the brute, below the tree,
Below the little stone, or speck of dust,
Which are themselves, and are made just.
Conforming to the law which bade them grow,
Not dreaming dreams of heaven in their estate so low!

The calm brutes live and are,
Tranquil and unafraid,
Keeping their nature only; the faint star
Pursues its orbit always though of Thee
It knows not, yet its vast periphery
Is ordered by Thy hand; by Thee were laid
The fixed foundations of the unfathomed sea;—
All these obey Thee, though they may not know
What law it is that holds them. Man alone
Sees Thee, and knowing Thee, averts his face,

And yet is higher than all for his disgrace,
Which were impossible to brute, or tree, or stone.

How shall a finite voice
Praise Thee who art too high for any praise,
Great Schème, that by eternal, perfect ways
Farest and dost rejoice!
Thou wert before Life was, or Ill.
Thou rulest all things still;
The Governance and Regimen are Thine,
Oh Plenitude divine!
Of all the orbs that roll,
Through all Thy infinite space.
We are through Thee alone, each in its place,
Organic, Inorganic, great and small;
Thou dost inspire and keep us all;
Earth, sky, and sea; herb, tree, insect, and brute;
All Thy created excellences mute,
To Man of large discourse, and the undying soul.

We know not by what Name our tongues shall call
Thee or Thy Essence, nor can Thought as yet
Gain those ineffable heights where Thou art set,
As from a watch-tower guarding all.
Thou girdest Thyself round with mystery,
As Thy great sun behind an embattled cloud,
Or some wrapt summit, never seen;
Yet Thy veiled presence cheers us on our road.
With eyes bent down too much on earth and bowed,
We toil and do forget
All but our daily labour and its load;
Yet art Thou there the while, felt yet unseen,
Oh universal Good, and Thy great Will
Directs our footsteps still—
Directs them, though they come to stray
From the appointed way
Lights them, though for a while they wander far,

Led by some feeble baleful star,
Which can allure them when the blinding fold
Of mist is on the hill side, and the cold
Clouds which make green our lives, descending, hide
Death's steeps on every side.

We know not what Thou art—
Whether the Word of some all-perfect Will
Inborn and nourished in each human heart,
Some hidden and mysterious good,
Obeyed, not understood;
Or whether the harmonious note
Of some world-symphony divine,
To which the perfect Scheme of things,
Ever advancing perfectly
To high fulfilment, sings.
We know not what Thou art, and yet we love;
We know not where Thou dwell'st, yet still above

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We turn our eyes to Thee, knowing Thou wilt take
Our yearnings and wilt treasure them, and make
Our little lives fulfil themselves and Thee :
And in this trust we bear to be.

Oh Light so white and pure,
Oft clouded and yet sure!
Oh inner Radiance of the heart,
That drawest all men, whatsoe'er Thou art!
Spring of the soul, that dost remove
Winter with rays of love,
And dost dispel of Thy far-working might
The clouds of Ill and Night,
For every soul which cometh to the earth;
That beamest on us at our birth,
And paling somewhat in life's grosser day,
Lightest, a pillar of fire, our evening way;
What matter by what Name

We call Thee?—still art Thou the same,
God call we Thee, or Good,—still through the strife
Unchangeable alone, of all our changeful life,
With awe-struck souls we seek Thee, we adore
Thy greatness ever more and more,
We turn to Thee with worship, till at last,
Our journey well-nigh past,
When now our day of Life draws to its end,
Looking, with less of awe and more of love,
To Thy high throne above,
We see no dazzling brightness as of old,
No kingly splendours cold,
But the sweet Presence of a heavenly Friend.

THE ODE OF EVIL.

THE ODE OF EVIL.

Oh, who shall sing of Life and not of Ill?
The essence of our will
Is fullest liberty to stray,
From out the green and blessed way,
Amid the desert wastes of drought and death.
This is the power that makes us free,
This of our Being is the penalty;
And maybe the Eternal Will,
Clothing itself with form to bid Creation be,
Took to itself some boundary, and awhile
Self-limited, made vile

And subjected to Law the Majesty
Which all the universe of space did fill.

Evil is Life,
The conflict of great laws pervading space ;
Evil is strife,
Which keeps the creature in its ordered place.
If any hand divine should e'er withdraw
The fixed coercive potency of Law,
Surely the universe of things would fade
And cease and be unmade.
Where Law is, there is Good,
And freedom to obey or to transgress ;
Else 'twere no Law, but, weaker far and less,
If one created being might not the thing it would.

Young lives spring up and fade,
Wither and are opprest,

Toil takes the world, and pain,
And all the things that God has made
Travail and groan and fain would be at rest,
And Wrong prevails again.
And we—we lift a hopeless eye
Up to the infinite sky,
Mourning the Ill that is, and shall be yet,
Weak creatures who forget
The very law and root of Life,
That it is sown in pain and nursed in woe and strife.

The evil blight of war
Torments the race from age to age,
And man slays man through all the years that are,
And savage lust and brutal rage
Deform this glorious heritage of earth.
We shudder and grow faint,
Knowing the far fair dreams of seer and saint

Show thin and little worth.
The young life, rising, sinks in sloughs of sense,
And wanders and is lost.
Alas! for days of young-eyed innocence.
Alas! for the calm hours ere, passion-tost,
The young soul grew, a white flower sweet and pure.
Yet this is sure,
That not in tranquil zones of endless calm
Springs up the victor's palm,
But blown by circling storms which blot the sky,
Nor fitting were it to the eye
Always to look upon a cloudless sun,—
Grown blind with too much light before the journey done.

The victories of Right
Are born of strife.
There were no Day were there no Night,
Nor, without dying, Life.

There only doth Right triumph, where the Wrong
Is mightiest and most strong;
There were no Good, indeed, were there no Ill.
And when the final victory shall come,
Burst forth, oh Awful Sun, and draw Creation home!

Not within Time or Space
Lines drawn in opposite ways grow one,
But in some Infinite place
Before the Eternal throne;
There, ways to-day divergent, Right and Wrong,
Approach the nearer that they grow more long.
There at the Eternal feet,
Fused, joined, and grown complete,
The circle rounds itself, the enclosing wall
Of the Universe sinks down, and God is all in all!

THE ODE OF AGE.

THE ODE OF AGE.

There is a sweetness in autumnal days,
Which many a lip doth praise;
When the earth, tired a little and grown mute
Of song, and having borne its fruit,
Rests for a little space ere winter come.
It is not sad to turn the face towards home;
Even though it shows the journey nearly done;
It is not sad to mark the westering sun,
Even though we know the night doth come.
Silence there is, indeed, for song,
Twilight for noon;

But for the steadfast soul and strong
Life's autumn is as June.

As June itself, but clearer, calmer far;
Here come no passion-gusts to mar,
No thunder-clouds or rains to beat
To earth the blossoms and the wheat,
No high tumultuous noise
Of youth's self-seeking joys,
But a cold radiance white
As the moon shining on a frosty night.

To-morrow is as yesterday, scant change,
Little of new or strange,
No glamour of false hope to daze,
Nor glory to amaze,
Even the old passionate love of love or child
A temperate affection mild,

And ever the recurring thought
Returning, though unsought:
How strange the scheme of things! how brief a span
The little life of man!
And ever as we mark them, fleeter and more fleet,
The days and months and years, gliding with winged feet.

And ever as the hair grows grey,
And the eyes dim,
And the lithe form which toiled the live-long day,
The stalwart limb,
Begin to stiffen and grow slow,
A higher joy they know:
To spend the season of the waning year
Ere comes the deadly chill,
In works of mercy, and to cheer
The feet which toil against life's rugged hill;

To have known the trouble and the fret,
To have known it, and to cease
In a pervading peace,
Too calm to suffer pain, too living to forget
And reaching down a succouring hand
To where the sufferers are,
To lift them to the tranquil heights afar,
Whereon Time's conquerors stand.

And when the precious hours are done,
How sweet at set of sun
To gather up the fair laborious day!—
To have struck some blow for right
With tongue or pen;
To have smoothed the path to light
For wandering men;
To have chased some fiend of Ill away;
A little backward to have thrust

The instant powers of Drink and Lust;
To have borne down Giant Despair;
To have dealt a blow at Care!
How sweet to light again the glow
Of warmer fires than youth's, tho' all the blood runs slow!

Oh! is there any joy,
Of all that come to girl or boy
Or manhood's calmer weal and ease,
To vie with these?
Here is some fitting profit day by day,
Which none can render less;
Some glorious gain Fate cannot take away,
Nor Time depress.
Oh, brother, fainting on your road!
Poor sister, whom the righteous shun!
There comes for you, ere life and strength be done,

An arm to bear your load.
A feeble body, maybe bent, and old,
But bearing 'midst the chills of age
A deeper glow than youth's; a nobler rage;
A calm heart yet not cold.
A man or woman, withered perhaps, and spent,
To whom pursuit of gold or fame
Is as a fire grown cold, an empty name,
Whom thoughts of Love no more allure,
Who in a self-made nunnery dwell,
A cloistered calm and pure,
A beatific peace greater than tongue can tell.

And sweet it is to take,
With something of the eager haste of youth,
Some fainter glimpse of Truth
For its own sake;
To observe the ways of bee, or plant, or bird;

To trace in Nature the ineffable Word,
Which by the gradual wear of secular time,
Has worked its work sublime;
To have touched, with infinite gropings dim,
Nature's extremest outward rim;
To have found some weed or shell unknown before;
To advance Thought's infinite march a footpace more;
To make or to declare laws just and sage;
These are the joys of Age.

Or by the evening hearth, in the old chair,
With children's children at our knees,
So like, yet so unlike the little ones of old—
Some little lad with curls of gold,
Some little maid demurely fair,
To sit, girt round with ease,
And feel how sweet it is to live,
Careless what fate may give;

To think, with gentle yearning mind,
Of dear souls who have crossed the Infinite Sea ;
To muse with cheerful hope of what shall be
For those we leave behind
When the night comes which knows no earthly morn ;
Yet mingled with the young in hopes and fears,
And bringing from the treasure-house of years
Some fair-set counsel long-time worn ;
To let the riper days of life,
The tumult and the strife,
Go by, and in their stead
Dwell with the living past, so living, yet so dead :
The mother's kiss upon the sleeper's brow,
The little fish caught from the brook,
The dead child-sister's gentle voice and look,
The school-days and the father's parting hand ;
The days so far removed, yet oh ! so near,
So full of precious memories dear ;
The wonder of flying Time, so hard to understand !

Not in clear eye or ear,
Dwells our chief profit here.
We are not as the brutes, who fade and make no sign;
We are sustained where'er we go,
In happiness and woe,
By some indwelling faculty divine,
Which lifts us from the deep
Of failing senses, aye, and duller brain,
And wafts us back to youth again;
And as a vision fair dividing sleep,
Pierces the vasts behind, the voids before,
And opens to us an invisible gate,
And sets our winged footsteps, scorning Time and Fate,
At the celestial door.

THE ODE OF DECLINE.

THE ODE OF DECLINE.

With forces well-nigh spent,
Uneasy or in pain,
Or brought to childish weakness once again,
With bodies shrunk and bent,
We come, if Fate so will, to cold decrepit age.
The book of Life lies open at its latest page.

Only four score of summers, and four score
Of winters, nothing more,
And then 'tis done.
We have spent our fruitful days beneath the sun;

We come to a cold season and a bare,
Where little is sweet or fair.
We, who a few brief years ago,
Would passionately go
Across the fields of life to meet the morn,
We are content, content and not forlorn,
To lie upon our beds, and watch the Day
Which kissed the Eastern peaks, grow gradually grey.

Great Heaven, that Thou hast made our lives so brief
And swiftly spent!
We toil our little day and are content,
Though Time, the thief,
Stands at our side, and smiles his mystic smile.
We joy a little, we grieve a little while;
We gain some little glimpse of Thy great laws,
Rolling in thunder through the voids of space;
We gain to look a moment on Thy face,

Eternal Source and Cause!
And then, the night descending as a cloud,
We walk with aspect bowed,
And turn to earth and see our Life grow dark.
Was it for this the fiery spark
Of Thy Eternal Self, sown on the vast
And infinite abysses of the Past,
Revealed itself and made Creation rise
Before Thy Eternal Mind:
This little span of life, with purblind eyes
That grow completely blind;
This little force of brain,
Holding dim thoughts sublime,
Too weak to withstand the treacheries of Time;
This body bent and bowed in twain,
Soon racked by growing pain,
Which briefer far than is the life of the tree,
Springs as a flower and fades, and then must rot

And perish and be not,
Passing from mystery to mystery?

It is a pain
To move through the old fields,—even though they lie
Before our eyes, we know that never again,
Where once our daily feet were used to pass
Amid the crested grass,
We any more shall wander till we die;
Nor to the old grey church, with the tall spire,
Whose vane the sunsets fire,
Where once a little child, by kind hands led,
Would spell the scant memorials of the dead,—
Never again, or once alone,
When pain and Time are done.

The soaring thoughts of youth
Are dead and cold, the victories of Thought

Are no more prized or sought
By eyes which draw too near the face of Truth.
Whatever fruit or gain
Fate held in store,
To tempt the growing soul or brain,
Allures no more.
It is as the late Autumn, when the fields
Are bare of flower or fruit;
Nor charm nor profit the swept surface yields,
Sullen and mute;
So that a doubting mind might come to hold
The very soul and life were dead and cold.

But who can peer
Into another soul, or tell at all
What hidden energies befall
The aged lingering here?
When all the weary brain

Seems dull, the immeasurable fields of life
Lie open to the memory, and again
They know the youthful joys, the hurry and the strife
And feel, but gentlier now, the ancient pain.
In the uneasy vigils of the night,
Before the tardy light;
Or, lonely days, when no young lives are by,
There come such long processions of the dead,
The buried lives and hopes of far-off years,
Spent joys and dried-up tears,
That round them stands a blessed company,
Holding high converse, though no word be said,
Till only what is past and gone doth seem
To live, and all the Present is a dream.

So may the wintry earth,
Holding her precious seeds within the ground,
Pause for the coming birth,

When like a trumpet-note the Spring shall sound;
So may the roots which, buried deep
And safe within her sleep,
Whisper as 'twere, within, tales of the sun,—
Whisper of leaf and flower, of bee and bird,—
Till by a sudden glory stirred,
A mystic influence bids them rise,
Bursting the narrow sheath
And cerement of death,
And bloom as lilies again beneath the recovered skies.

THE ODE OF CHANGE.

THE ODE OF CHANGE.

I have come to the time of the failing of breath;
I have reached the cold threshold of Death!

Death! there is not any Death; only infinite change,
Only a place of life which is novel and strange.
Change! there is naught but change and renewal of strife,
Which make up the infinite changes we sum up in life.

Life! what is life, that it ceases with ceasing of breath?
Death! what were Life without change, but an infinite
Death?

As I lie on my bed, and the sun, like a furnace of fire,
Burns amid the old pines in the west, ere the last rays
expire,
Can I dream he will rise no more, but a fathomless night
Shall brood o'er Creation for ever, and shut out the
light?
It is done, this Day of our Life; but another shall rise,
Day for ever following Day, in the infinite skies,
Day following Day for ever!

Day following day, with the starlit darkness between;
Or, maybe in a world where Dawn comes, ere our sunset
has been;
Day following Day for ever!

For ever! though who shall tell in what seeming or where?
In what far-off secret space of God's limitless air?
It matters nothing at all what we are or where set,
If a spark of the Infinite Light can shine on us yet.
Life following Life for ever!

Life following Life for ever! for what if the Sun
Grew chilled, and the universe cold, and the orbits undone,
And all the great globes should fall back into chaos once more;
They would wake at a glance of the Light, as they wakened before.
There is no Death for ever!

Cease! but how should we cease while God's light shall remain?
He that has lighted Life's flame shall light it again!
What if He take back for a while, as the sun from the sea,
Some spark of the radiance divine that bade all things to be?
We rest in Him, we are sunk, we are folded in Him, but we are;
As the star which draws near to the sun is obscured, but is still a star.
There is only Change for ever!

Shall I fear that I shall be changed and no more shall be I?—
I who know not what 'tis that I am, to live or to die?
Nay, while God is, I too must be, else too weak were His hand,

The created is part of His essence,—how else could the Maker stand?
There is no Death for ever!

Take me, oh infinite Cause, and cleanse me of wrong!
Take me, raise me to higher Life through centuries long!
Cleanse me, by pain, if need be, through æons of days!
Take me and purge me, still I will answer with praise—
There is no Death for ever!

Shall I mourn for those who are not? Nay, while love and regret
Still linger within our souls, they live with us yet.
If we love, then the souls that we love, they exist and they are,
As memory which makes us ourselves, brings precious things from far.
Love lives and is for ever!

We are part of an Infinite Scheme,
All we that are;
Man the high crest and crown of things that be,
The fiery-hearted earth, the cold unfathomed sea,
The central sun, the intermittent star.
Things great and small,
We are but parts of the Eternal All;
We live not in a barren, baseless dream;
No endless, ineffectual chain
Of chance successions launched in vain;
But every beat of Time,
Each sun that shines or fails to shine,
Each animate life that comes to throb or cease,
Each life of herb or tree
Which springs aloft and then has ceased to be,
Each change of strife and peace,
Each soaring thought sublime,

Each deed of wrong and blood,
Each impulse towards an unattainèd good,—
All with a sure, unfaltering working tend
To one Ineffable, Beatific End.
Oh hidden Scheme, perfect Thyself, and take
Our petty lives, and mould them as Thou wilt!
All things that are, are only for Thy sake,
And not to obey Thee is our only guilt!
Perfect Thyself, and be fulfilled, oh great
Unfathomable Will, who art our Life and Fate!

There is hope, but nothing of fear,
Nought but a patient mind,
For him who waits with conscience clear
And soul resigned
Whate'er the mystic coming change
Shall bring of new and strange.
He looks back once upon the fields of life,

The good and evil locked in strife,
The happy and the unhappy days,
The Right we always love, the oft-triumphant Wrong;
And all his being to a secret song
Sings with a mighty and unfaltering voice—
"I have been; Thou hast done all things well; I am glad; I give thanks; I rejoice!"

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

THE EPIC OF HADES.

*BOOK II.**

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> To which the whole Creation moves.

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"It would be well, indeed, if our more successful versifiers as a rule fulfilled their early promise as calmly, equably, and melodiously as the author. His range of moral sympathy is large, and his intellectual view is wide enough to embrace a great variety of subjects."—*Guardian*, September 1st, 1875.

"If each book that he publishes is to mark as steady improvement as have his second and third, the world may surely look for something from the writer which shall immortalize him and remain as a treasure to literature."—*Graphic*, June 1st, 1875.

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GWEN:

A DRAMA IN MONOLOGUE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE EPIC OF HADES."

OPINIONS OF THE PRESS.

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"Pretty, pensive, and pathetic are the epithets which in an alliterative mood one would feel disposed to apply to 'Gwen.' There are many exquisite passages, however, touching and musical, thoughtful and suggestive; and the two principal characters pour out their hearts one to another in alternate bursts of song, as bird sings to bird among the branches."—*Illustrated News*, February 8th.

"The piece as a whole will repay very attentive perusal, while here and there in it there is a particular choice bit of work. Here, for example, is a fine lyric . . . and here a love-song of rare and exquisite beauty."—*New York Evening Post*, February 20th.

"The book abounds with lyrics worthy, alike from their metrical sweetness and their deep tenderness and purity, to be set to music; while over the whole story we are conscious of the easy power and the consummate mastery of his noble art, which distinguish the author. He is to be congratulated upon a genuine success in a new field, which must do much to sustain and extend his well-earned fame."—*Leeds Mercury*, February 26th.

"Few among the later poets of our time have received such a generous welcome as the author. He has been appreciated not by critics alone, but by the general public. . . . The charm of 'Gwen' is to be found in the limpid clearness of the versification, in the pathetic notes which tell the old story of true love wounded and crushed. Nothing can be more artistically appropriate or more daintily melodious than the following. . . . "—*Pall Mall Gazette*, October 8th.

"Our author has a message to deliver to the age which no other can deliver so well as he."—*Freeman*, August 15th.

"Seldom has literature been enriched by a more beautiful poem than the author's latest work, 'Gwen,' which ought to extend the popularity he has gained already. It surpasses any of his former works in intensity of pathos and subtle and vivid delineation of passion."—*Scotsman*, June 5th.

"The poem is, as a whole, tender, simple, chaste in feeling, and occasionally it rises to a lyrical loftiness of sentiment or grows compact with vigorous thought."—*New York "Nation,"* March 27th.

"The writer has gained inspiration from themes which inspired Dante; he has sung sweet songs and musical lyrics; and whether writing in rhyme or blank verse, has proved himself a master of his instrument. He knows, like all true poets, how to transmute what may be called common into the pure gold of poetry."—*Spectator*, July 26th.

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